



After an Esophagus Cancer Diagnosis



Esophagus or esophageal cancer is a type of cancer that starts in the esophagus. Your esophagus is the soft tube that connects the mouth to the stomach. If you have been told you have esophagus cancer, you've probably already had tests, x-rays and scans, and a biopsy (a test that takes some tissue to check for cancer). Other tests might have been done on the cancer cells to check for certain proteins and gene changes called biomarkers. You might also have other procedures to find out if the cancer has spread. These tests help your doctor know what type of esophagus cancer you have, what stage it is, and what treatment might help.

Treatment for esophagus cancer

Your treatment will depend on the type and stage of the esophagus cancer. Your treatment options will also depend on the results of tests on the cancer cells, your health, and your personal preferences.

Surgery may be done to try to remove the cancer if it's small and has not spread. Sometimes, surgery may be done to remove all or part of the esophagus. This is called an esophagectomy. Recovery from this surgery can take longer if the whole esophagus is removed.

Sometimes, a scope or endoscopy is used to treat cancer. Other treatments for esophagus cancer can include radiation, chemo, targeted therapy, or immunotherapy. You may need more than one type of treatment. Several treatments can be used to help prevent or relieve symptoms of esophagus cancer. Sometimes, they are given along with other treatments. Your doctor will help you decide which treatments are best for you.

Be sure to ask:

- What type of esophagus cancer do I have?
- What stage is the esophagus cancer, and what does that mean?
- What else have you learned from my test results?
- Will I need more tests?
- What treatment do you think is best for me?
- What is the goal of treatment?
- Will I need surgery? Can all of the tumor be removed?
- Does my esophagus need to be removed? If so, how much of it?
- Will I be able to eat, chew, and swallow normally after surgery? If not, what can be done to help?

What to expect before and during treatment

Your cancer care team will explain your treatment plan to you. This team may include different doctors, nurses, and other health care workers, depending on the type of treatment you need. For example, if you need surgery, your care team will tell you how much of your esophagus needs to be removed, what to expect after surgery, and if how you eat might change. If you need other types of treatment, your cancer care team will explain how it is given, help you get ready for it, keep track of how you're doing, and help you with any side effects. You might also get blood tests, scans, or other tests at certain times to see how well your treatment is working.

Not everyone going through treatment for esophagus cancer will have the same side effects. For example, a person might have part or all of their esophagus removed. If this happens, a feeding tube might be needed. The side effects of this surgery are different from the side effects of chemo, radiation, or targeted therapy. And people getting the same treatment might have different side effects.

Be sure to ask:

- What side effects might I have, and what can I do about them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- How often will I get treatment? How long will it last?
- Where will I go to get treatment? Can I drive myself?
- Will I be able to keep doing my usual activities, like work and exercise?
- If I need a feeding tube, how long will I need it?
- Is there a certain diet I should follow?
- Are there any clinical trials that might be right for me?

What to expect after treatment

After treatment, ask your cancer doctor for a treatment summary and follow-up plan. This is called a survivorship care plan. Your cancer doctor will work with your family or primary care doctor to help manage side effects from treatment and check your general health. You will have regular tests to check if your cancer has come back or if a new cancer has started in a different part of your body.

You might be faced with changes to your body after treatment. Surgery and other treatments may change how your esophagus works. This could change how and what you can eat and drink. Be sure to ask the doctor what to expect and let them know if you have any problems.

People who have had esophagus cancer are at risk of having it again or getting certain other types of cancer. Even if you feel fine after finishing treatment, it's important to ask your cancer care team about a regular schedule for follow-up tests to check if your esophagus cancer has come back.

For some people, the cancer might not go away completely. They might continue to get treatment, and tests will still be needed to see how well it's working.

Be sure to ask:

- Where do I get a copy of my treatment summary and follow-up plan?
- How often do I need to see my cancer care team?
- When and how should I contact them?
- Will I need tests to see if my cancer has come back, or to check for problems from my treatment?
- Do I need a special diet after treatment?
- Do I need any screening tests, like a mammogram or colonoscopy, to find other cancers early?
- Are there late or long-term side effects from treatment that I should watch for?
- Where can I find my medical records after treatment?

Staying healthy

Be sure to tell your doctor or cancer care team if any treatment side effects don't go away or if you have any new symptoms.

There are things you can do to keep yourself healthy during and after treatment. Not smoking and not drinking alcohol are ways to help reduce your chances of esophagus cancer getting worse or coming back. Maintaining a healthy weight and eating well may be a problem if you can't swallow or have trouble swallowing after treatment. You can work with your health care team to know what the best way is to get the nutrients you need. Staying active can also help you stay healthy and may lower your risk of getting other cancers.

Dealing with your feelings

Having esophagus cancer might make you feel scared, sad, or nervous. It's normal to have these feelings, and there are ways to help you cope with them.

- Don't try to deal with your feelings by yourself. Talk about them, no matter what they are.
- It's OK to feel sad or down once in a while, but let your cancer care team know if you have these feelings for more than a few days.
- If your doctor says it's OK, continue doing things you enjoy like spending time outdoors, going to a movie or sporting event, or going out to dinner.
- Get help with tasks like cooking and cleaning.

You might want to reach out to friends, family, or religious leaders or groups. Counseling can also help. Some people find it helpful to talk with others who've been through the same things. A support group can offer that. Tell your cancer care team how you're feeling. They can help you find the right support.



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/esophaguscancer or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.